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NEWS Release

For Immediate Release

Topic: Community Problem Prompts Hepatitis A Seminar
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With one-third as many hepatitis A cases to date in 2000 as in the whole year of 1999, public health and restaurant officials aim to use combined forces to interrupt the disease's spread in the Greater Jackson Area.

Mississippi State Department of Health and Mississippi Restaurant Association jointly sponsor a seminar about a community problem from 2 to 4 p.m. Wednesday, February 23, at Ramada Inn Southwest.

State Health Officer Dr. Ed Thompson, State Epidemiologist Dr. Mary Currier, and Food Protection Director Charlene Bruce headline the "*Learn What You Need To Know About Hepatitis A*" agenda.

Sponsors aim for food service establishments to learn more about how to deal with the disease and lessen the impact on the business when a community resident who is a food handler develops the disease.

"No transmission of hepatitis A from any food service establishment has been identified," emphasized Dr. Currier. "The hepatitis A outbreak in the Greater Jackson Area is a *community* problem with intense public interest. While persons who work as food handlers have a critical role in prevention of common-source food-borne outbreaks, they are *not* at increased risk for hepatitis A *because* of their occupation."

"Mississippi Restaurant Association remains committed to assist in resolving the community's hepatitis A problem," said Mike Cashion, executive director.

“Food-borne hepatitis A outbreaks are relatively uncommon in the United States,” Dr. Currier repeated. “When they occur, intensive public health efforts are required to protect health and to protect the integrity and reputation of the industry.”

Dr. Currier reported 29 cases of hepatitis A in the Greater Jackson Area this year, with 27 of those among Jackson residents. This compares to 76 Jackson Metropolitan Area cases in 1999 – 61 in Jackson, 4 in Hinds County, and 11 in Rankin County.

Hepatitis A – a liver disease caused by the hepatitis A virus – is easily transmitted through food and water. Hepatitis A virus spreads from person to person by putting into the mouth something that has been contaminated with the stool of a person with hepatitis A.

“For this reason, the virus is more easily spread in areas where sanitary conditions are poor or where people do not practice good personal hygiene,” Dr. Currier said. “The best way to prevent the spread of hepatitis A is with proper hand-washing!

“In communities with hepatitis A outbreaks, where food handlers are at risk for infection outside the work place,” she added, “vaccination to prevent the disease might be appropriate.”

Persons with hepatitis A virus infection might not have any signs or symptoms of the disease. Older persons are more likely to have symptoms than children. If symptoms are present, they usually occur abruptly and may include fever, tiredness, loss of appetite, nausea, abdominal discomfort, dark urine, and jaundice (yellowing of the skin and eyes). Symptoms usually last about two weeks; a few persons are ill for longer. The average incubation period for hepatitis A is 28 days (range: 15–50 days).

Hepatitis A virus is spread from person to person by putting something in the mouth that has been contaminated with the stool of a person with hepatitis A. This type of transmission is called "fecal-oral." For this reason, the virus is more easily spread in areas with poor sanitary conditions or where people do not observe good personal hygiene. Most infections result from contact with a household member or sex partner who has hepatitis A. Casual contact, as in the usual office, factory, or school setting, does not spread the virus.

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